

Grievances of the People.

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and the good of the State, and, in particular, the righting of these agrarian wrongs. Their demands were accentuated by spasmodic risings in Gloucester, Somerset, Plants, Wilts, in the spring of 1548. English rustics were not the men to revolt for mere theoretic principles, and these risings were the outcome of very poignant grievances. They were goaded into desperate courses by the trickery, the chicanery, that made them hungry and homeless. It was, in fact, economically a period when the simple folk of a parish or a district were exposed to the sharp practice of the local Uriah Heaps, whose policy was one of rascality and ruin towards everybody but themselves. It was an age without conscience or pity; and while it made thousands, aye, tens of thousands, vagabonds and criminals, it made the fortunes of the men with a sharp eye to business. If things were bad enough in More's time, they were much worse thirty years later. Though many of the monasteries were sinks of iniquity, they had at least provided what the workhouses of a later period provided for the unfortunate poor—refuge and subsistence. Now that the monasteries were suppressed, and their lands in the clutch of the greedy aristocracy, the cities and the highways were infested with beggars, thrown out of home and occupation by the land-grabbers—starving, stealing, hungering to death. Such of them as were willing to work could not find occupation, and could not therefore pay for the provisions which had doubled or trebled in price within a few years. It is not surprising that they fought for redress of grievances rather than die from starvation in street or highway. What is surprising is that a Protestant bishop like Miles Coverdale—and he the translator of the Bible—should have preached a thanksgiving sermon among the bodies of the slaughtered peasants. Luther was evidently not the only Protestant theologian who, Bible in hand, took the side of the rich against the poor. And it was not only on the battlefield that the rich had the best of it; they were also omnipotent in the law courts.

Here is a vivid passage from one of these contemporary scribes, which focusses the causes of the social upheaval in a single short paragraph. "If I shuld demaunde of the pore man of the contrey," wrote Crowley in "The Way to Wealth" (1550), "what thinge he thinketh to be the cause of sedition,